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A NOTE ON THE *LAMENTATION OF MARY*

The Middle-English *Lamentation of Mary*¹—based on a Latin sermon popularly ascribed to St. Bernard—begins in most copies with thirty-two lines preceding the invocation. The following parallel quotations will show that this introduction was suggested by a similar one introducing an Anglo-Norman version of the same work, written in England during the thirteenth century, which, for the rest, bears no special relation to the Middle-English poem.²

Her is a gret lamentacion betwene vr
ladi & seint Bernard, Of cristes
passion, hire dere sone, þat was so
pyneful & so hard.

*Ici cummence li livre de les lamenta-
ciuns Nostre Dame seinte Marie.*

Lewed men be not lered in lore,
As Clerkes ben in holi writ;
þauȝ men prechen hem bi-fore,
Hit wol not wonen in heore wit:
þerfore is þat I syke sore,
ffor broþurhede, as God hit bit,
And, ȝif cristes wille wore,
Wel fayn I wolde amenden hit.

Pur ceus e pur cels ki n'entendent
quant oient lire latin
Ai comencé iceste livre;
Deus i met bon fin!
Jeo vei qe la gente lettré
unt lur joie de seint escrist,
Car quant entendent ceo qu'il oient
l'alme en ad mult grant delit.
Les lais ne sevent qe ceo est a dire,
dunt sovent ai grant pité.
Car ausi bien les dei amer
cum les clerks en charité,
Madles, femmes, tute gent
del siecle e de religion,
A tuz sumes nous docturs
en tant cum fere le poïm.
Par tant, del petit ke jeo sai
vous ai iceste romaunce escrit.

ȝif Crist haue send mon wit at
wille,
Craft of Clergye, for to preche,
Alle hise hestes scholde we fulfille
As ferforþ as we mihten areche.
ȝonge and olde, holdeþ ow stille:
ffor broþerhed I wol ow teche—
þe Mon þat con, and teche nille,
He mai haue drede of godes wreche.

¹ Ed. in *The Minor Poems of the Vernon MS.*, E.E.T.S., No. 98, pp. 297 ff. A text without the lines here quoted is printed by Horstman, *Yorkshire Writers* (London, 1894), II, 274.

² Described by M. Paul Meyer in *Romania*, XV, 309 ff. Two manuscripts are known, from each of which Meyer quotes the opening lines. The French poem is a far closer version of its original than the English.

perfore ichaue on Englisch wrouzt,
 Seint Bernard witnesset in Latyn—
 Mon may be glad in al his pouzt
 þat his wit haþ leid þer-In.
 þe gospel nul I forsake nouzt,
 þauz hit be writen in parchemyn;
 Seynt Iones word, and hit be souzt,
 þer-of hit wole be witnes myn.

While Ihesu crist on eorþe eode,
 Mony of his Miracles writen þei
 were:

þer nis no mon þat mihte rede
 þe goodnesse þat he dude here.
 Men and wymmen, ze schulen haue
 mede,
 Lusteneþ alle now me I-feere;
 ȝif I sigge mis, takeþ good hede,
 And wisseþ me, þat hit betere were.

ffader and sone and holy gost . . .
 [pp. 297-99].

Ore liece (*sic*), ne puet estre
 qi ne ad acune delit;
 Si rien oiez qe vous semble
 qe en evangeile ne seit escrit
 Sachez bien qe en sun livre
 seint Johan apert le dit:
 Car si tut fu mis en livre
 kancke Jhesu fist et dist,
 Tut le monde n'en entendreit,
 tant fu[st] grant icel escrit.
 Pur ceo vous pri comunement
 qe cest romance lir orretz;
 Si ren oiez qe vous despleise,
 jeo prie nel descreez.
 Rien n'i ad pur verité,
 si vous die hardiement;
 Le perteus(?) ne proveieie
 si fuisse meïsmes en present.
 Seint Bernard fist iceste livre,
 mès poi i ai mis del men;
 Ore prium duz Jhesu
 ke chevir le puisse bien.

Ki me durra tant de lermes
 ke plurer puisse nuit et jour
 Jeske atant qe sun serjant
 conforte le duz Seignur? . . .
 [*Romania*, XV, 310-11].

HOPE EMILY ALLEN

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